

Holy Assupmtion Russian Orthodox Church
Kenai
Kenai-Cook Inlet Division
Alaska

HABS No. AK-39-A

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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Addendum for

Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church
Mission and Overland Streets
Kenai
Kenai Peneinsula Borough
Alaska

HABS No. AK-39A

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
HOLY ASSUMPTION RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

HABS No. AK-39-A

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Location: Mission and Overland streets, Kenai, Kenai Peninsula Borough, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant: Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church.

Significance: One of the oldest Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska, Holy Assumption Church has a high, square, pyramidal-roofed nave framed by two gable-roofed sections. The belltower, 81' to the top of its cross, was added five years after initial construction. The log church, now clad with beveled siding, was built in 1894-95.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1894-95. Construction began on June 13, 1894, and the church was consecrated on June 9, 1895.¹ The belltower was completed in 1900.
2. Architect: The church was built under the direction of the local priest, Fr. Alexander Yaroshevich, whom the succeeding priest described as the "builder-priest."² It is not known how much Yaroshevich contributed to the design, however.
3. Original plans and construction: In 1896 a church publication described the church:

The new Kenai temple is constructed in the shape of a ship, of logs, . . . with a capacity of 80 persons, with an ikonostas. On the ikonostas and on the Royal Doors are new ikons. . . The walls of the temple are wall-papered and the ceiling is painted with oil[-based] paint. The porch [narthex] is divided into two small rooms: one designated as a vestry, the other as an archives and for church supplies. The [exterior] walls are not yet sided; the roof is shingled and painted with oil[-based] paint. There is no bell tower, but the bells (3) hang from a beam under a portico built over the entrance

¹ Ioann Bortnofsky, "The Kenai Mission," Russian Orthodox American Messenger 2 (1988): 530-531, translated and cited in Barbara Smith, "National Register Nomination: Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church," National Park Service, 1985.

² Ibid.

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door to the narthex.³

The building was probably sided soon after, for an 1895 freighting order included a quantity of "rustic #1" siding. The same order included the following paints: white lead, prussian blue, chrome yellow, and burnt umber, suggesting that the present color scheme is close to the original.⁴

Fr. Ioann Bortnofsky reported that funding for the church came from the local parish as well as the Alaska Ecclesiastical Consistory; the Holy Ruling Synod in Russia also contributed \$400. The church Brotherhood raised \$100 for the new icons.

4. Alterations and additions: The belltower was added in 1900. The next year a diocesan official commented: "The Kenai church is brand new and in the best site. It is much enhanced now by the addition to the nave of a high bell-tower."⁵ The round-arched openings in the belfry were originally left open, but by 1961 they had been glazed. In the 1978-1979 renovation, the windows were replaced with louvers.

At an unknown time, probably when the belltower was added, the narthex described in 1896 as having two rooms was opened to the nave, separated only by two columns.

In 1978-1979, CCC/HOK, architects from Anchorage, directed a renovation of the building. The work included installation of a new foundation; installation of insulation and vapor barriers, necessitating new wall coverings on the interior (and removing twelve layers of wallpaper); the addition of thermopane windows; bringing the electricity up to code; and installation of electric baseboard heaters.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

The first chapel was built at Nikolaevsk Redoubt (present-day Kenai) in 1841 by the Russian-American Company, but there is no record of its appearance. A Russian fur-trading company, the Lebedev-Lastochin Company, had first settled here in 1791. After the Russian-American Company was granted a monopoly in Alaska, Nikolaevsk became the Russian-American Company's largest settlement on the Kenai Peninsula. In 1844, Igumen (Abbot) Nicholas was assigned to Kenai. Using it as his base, he traveled widely throughout the region until his death in 1867.

³ "In Kenai," Russian Orthodox American Messenger 1 (1896): 5/79-80, translated and cited in Smith.

⁴ May 6, 1895, to Alaska Commercial Company, Alaska Russian Church Archives, reel 181.

⁵ Antonii (Dashkevich), Hieromonk, "Around the Sitka District," Russian Orthodox American Messenger 5 (1901): 3/61-63, translated and cited in Smith.

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In 1849, Abbot Nicholas constructed a church, as Bishop Innocent elevated Kenai to a parish seat. Three years later the bishop reported that the former chapel had been "rebuilt" and equipped by the Russian-American Company.⁶ At the time of the sale of Alaska to the United States, it was described as "A timber-built Church of the Assumption, situated inside the pallisades at the northwest corner of it; a timber house for the priest in the immediate vicinity of the church."⁷ Among many other activities, Abbot Nicholas established a school in Kenai in the 1860s.

After Abbot Nicholas's death in 1867, Kenai did not receive a resident priest until 1881. That priest, Abbot Nikita, remodeled the church in 1883, although the nature of the work undertaken at that time is not known. An 1880s photograph⁸ shows it to be a hip-roofed building, with a gable-roofed sanctuary at the east end. The nave is topped by an onion dome.

This 1849 church was apparently located near the site of the present church (as shown in photographs) but not on the exact site. After construction of the new church, the old one was used as a school, probably until 1898 when a separate school was erected. The church was demolished shortly thereafter.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The rectangular church has a pyramidal-roofed nave flanked by gable-roofed sections. On the east, the gable-roofed sanctuary has a polygonal end. On the west, a three-story belltower abuts the gable-roofed narthex.
2. Condition of fabric: good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 23'-0" x 44'-6", not including the square belltower at the west end. On the east end, the sanctuary has a semi-hexagonal end.
2. Foundations: Concrete block.

⁶ Report of Archbishop Innokenty, November 28, 1852, Documents Relative to the History of Alaska, 1:356.

⁷ Cited in Roman Malach, "Old Fort Kenay," Alaska Sportsman 30 (December 1964): 60.

⁸ Photograph dated ca. 1881-1886, identified as Signal Corps Photograph No. 111-SC-87815, and also in the collection of the Homer Society of Natural History, included with the National Register Nomination.

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3. Walls: Beveled siding, painted white with brown trim. There is some stylized scalloping at the cornice of the belltower, painted light blue.
4. Structural system: Logs hewn to a 6" width, dovetailed at the corners and chinked with moss.
5. Porches: There is a gable-roofed porch with chamfered box columns, a wooden floor, and concrete steps.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main doorway has paneled double doors.
 - b. Windows: The six-over-six-light windows are set in plain surrounds. The nave is lit by double windows.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof is pyramidal over the nave and belltower, and gabled over the narthex and sanctuary. The polygonal end of the sanctuary is covered by a lower, similarly polygonal roof. All of the wood shingles are painted a bright shade of green.
 - b. Belltower: The two-story 15'-square tower supports an octagonal belfry with round-arched, louvered openings. It is surmounted by a tent roof, attenuated onion dome, and cross.
 - c. Cupolas: Over the nave, there is an octagonal cupola, onion dome, and cross. The sanctuary has a smaller, but similar, cupola with onion dome and cross.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The nave, which is about 22' square, is marked by an octagonal ceiling. The narthex, although a separate element on the exterior, is today separated from the nave on the interior only by its lower ceiling and round columns on high square bases.
2. Stairways: The amvon is raised one step, with a semi-circular projection in the center.
3. Flooring: Wall to wall carpeting over wood planks.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plasterboard above a plank wainseot. The ceiling, of planks, slopes on eight sides to its flat, octagonal center. The ceiling is

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painted blue with yellow trim.

5. Doorways: There are double doors between the vestibule and narthex, of four lights over two panels.
6. Decorative features: The iconostas, painted white with gold trim, is divided into seven bays by unpainted mahogany pilasters with gold moldings and maltese crosses. Over each bay is a round-arched element; the one over the center bay holds an icon of the Last Supper. The icons, probably the "new icons" mentioned in the 1898 description, are oil on canvas.
7. Bells: There are three bells in the belltower, not marked with engravings, but probably dating from the 1890s.
8. Hardware: Three-tier brass chandelier, painted gold. Brass sconces on the walls have received the same treatment.
9. Mechanical equipment: Electric baseboard heat and gas spaceheaters.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church faces west with the altar on the east end, as is traditional in Russian Orthodox churches. The church is near the center of the old town of Kenai.
2. Historic Landscape: The churchyard was enclosed with a picket fence in 1900, although this disappeared after a few decades. It was reconstructed in the 1980s.
3. Outbuildings: Across the street to the north is the rectory (HABS No. AK-39-C), and to the southwest is the Chapel of St. Nicholas (HABS No. AK-39-B). The cemetery is to the northwest. On the northeast, next to the rectory, was the Russian school, a one-and-a-half-story log building constructed in 1898. Currently on that site is the Fort Kenai Museum, a log building constructed in 1967 in commemoration of Alaska's centennial.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early views:

The following photographs are included with the National Historic Landmark nomination:

Photograph dated ca. 1881-1886, identified as Signal Corps Photograph No. 111-sc-87815, and also in the collection of the Homer Society of Natural History, shows the previous church and present rectory in the background of a general shot of the village. In the foreground are a variety of log buildings and eaches.

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Photograph dated ca. 1905-1910, from the collection of Mary Ford of Kenai, shows the church and rectory. The church is surrounded by a picket fence, has an open belfry, and a painted line on the exterior marking the nave on the interior.

Photograph dated ca. 1919, from Mary Ford of Kenai, who obtained a copy from Betty Lande of Soldotna, is taken from a high advantage. It shows the western end of town, including the church, rectory, and chapel. This photograph is also reprinted in Fern A. Wallace, The Flame of the Candle (Chilliwack, B.C.: SS. Kyril and Methody Society, 1974), plate 130.

Photograph dated 1949 from Jettie Peterson of Kenai shows the church without its picket fence. Next to the rectory is the Russian school.

Mary Ford, "The Russian Orthodox Church," Once Upon the Kenai: Stories from the People, compiled by the Kenai Historical Society (Kenai, 1984), p. 419, includes a 1915 photograph of the church and rectory.

- B. Bibliography: Most of the information for this report was drawn from Barbara Smith's comprehensive National Register nomination, "Holy Assumption Russian Orthodox Church," National Park Service, 1985. The building has been designated a National Historic Landmark, and the complete nomination is located in the History Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Alaskan Russian Church Archives, microfilm reel 181, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Documents Relative to the History of Alaska. Microfilm of typescript translation of Russian-language and other documents, including excerpts from the Alaskan Russian Church Archives in vols. 1 and 2, Library of Congress.

Ford, Mary. "The Russian Orthodox Church." Once Upon the Kenai: Stories from the People. Kenai: Kenai Historical Society, 1984. pp. 416-419.

Malach, Roman. "Old Fort Kenay." Alaska Sportsman 30 (December 1964): 38ff.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of the Holy Resurrection Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report. The measured

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drawings were executed in summer 1986 by David Snow, project director; Randall Skeirik and Ken Martin, architectural technicians; and Sandra M. Faulkner, historian.

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U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013